

The VP Is In

Have something to say? Share your questions, concerns, thoughts, and ideas with Vice President for Student Affairs Edward Spencer at The VP Is In open sessions, held in partnership with the Student Government Association. Visit the SGA website for information about upcoming sessions.

Wondering what other students have to say about the university? See what happened at past sessions below:

November 30, 2011

A small group of students gathered with me in Deet's Place on November 30 for the last "The VP is In" session of the semester. What follows are some quick summary notes of the topics we discussed.

Concern was expressed that often students turn in group projects and wait for lengthy periods of time before they receive grading information from a faculty member (and usually through their Scholar site). One student reported turning in a project two months ago and still not having any grading feedback on it. So, I pass that on, particularly to faculty who might be reading the column, to urge them to make every effort to provide feedback in a timely manner.

Since there is on-going discussion about whether the time periods for fall break and Thanksgiving break should be changed, I was asked about the history here. I pointed out that having a full week for Thanksgiving is a vestige of the quarter system; when Virginia Tech operated under a quarter system, we had a full week off at Thanksgiving. When we switched to a semester system, people did not want to give up that full week and we have maintained a full week's vacation for Thanksgiving, something which is unusual for a school on the semester system. Later, as people realized it was a long stretch from late August until mid- or late November, a one-day fall break (now on a Friday) in the middle of October was added. What has become problematic is that these calendars are determined several years in advance when it is not yet known on which weekends there will be a home football game until late January of each year. I have suggested to various groups that as we determine calendars for the future, we simply mark October with an asterisk and indicate that there will be a fall break weekend, but that the exact weekend for that break will be determined later after the football schedule is known. In this way we can avoid programming in a fall break that winds up coinciding with a home football game and instead choose a weekend in October for the fall break when there is either an away game or a bye.

One student asked about the oval track structure being placed near the tennis courts on Washington Street. I followed up on that after the session and learned from our Recreational Sports staff that this is a roller hockey rink. When construction began on the basketball practice facility, we lost six tennis courts and a roller hockey rink that had been constructed on an older tennis court. Athletics relocated the six tennis courts to the South Recreation Area platform (the intramural field area). However, the roller hockey rink was never replaced until this fall when some storm water management issues were addressed. We have finally recaptured that space as

an outdoor roller hockey rink. It is used by the Club Roller Hockey Team and then it is also used by a roller hockey group that plays games there. The Club Roller Hockey team is part of Recreational Sports; the roller hockey group is not part of Recreational Sports.

Students are excited about going to the ACC Championship game this weekend. However, many students had difficulty obtaining tickets and there was a reported server crash involved as students were trying to order tickets.

We had a discussion about the misuse of such drugs as Adderall and Ritalin. I noted that a recent article in the Roanoke Times pointed out concerns about some students sharing these drugs with others who do not have a prescription for them. I noted that Duke University has even written into their student code of conduct a policy violation that essentially reads as "unauthorized use of a prescription drug for academic enhancement purposes."

Another topic of discussion was exactly how our "Good Samaritans Bystander Intervention policy" works. I indicated that some schools have gone to a total "amnesty" policy for students who seek medical attention for themselves or others due to excessive alcohol consumption whereas other schools have insisted that there are always consequences to policy violations and have been very opposed to conveying "amnesty" in such situations. The change that we made here this past summer is between those two options and allows our Student Conduct hearing officers and hearing panels to take into consideration circumstances, such as seeking medical help or intervening as a bystander, when determining sanctions in such cases. Our new policy here is known as our "Policy on Self-Reporting and Bystander Intervention."

We also talked about student dissatisfaction with the Black Sheep publication and the Sex Talk program on VTTV. Students were concerned that the presence of such publications and programs really leaves an inappropriate impression on visitors, perspective students, etc. We then went on to talk a little bit about the content of the Collegiate Times. One student made the suggestion that the Collegiate Times ought to invite faculty to write articles and columns using their expertise in their discipline.

We concluded with a discussion of increasing interest in foreign language courses. I noted that the University is considering various ways of expanding the opportunities here for students in both an active classroom and in an on-line, self-study approach.

Good luck to all of you on your final exams. I hope that everyone enjoys a wonderful winter break and for those of you graduating this month, congratulations. I look forward to being your commencement speaker!

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